



NEWS RELEASE

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Mitch Snow 202-208-5634

SERVICE HONORS PRIVATE WETLANDS CONSERVATION EFFORTS

A program aimed at saving Maine's coastal wetlands and innovative efforts to restore bottomland hardwood forest in Tennessee earned the 1996 National Wetlands Conservation Awards, Mollie Beattie, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

Maine's Coastal Heritage Trust, headquartered in Northeast Harbor, and Dean and Murry Moore of Moore Brothers Farms in Dyersburg, Tennessee, were selected for the award by a panel of judges representing the Service. The Service recognizes outstanding private-sector contributions by both individuals and organizations to wetlands conservation every year.

"Wetlands serve as home to some of our Nation's best-loved wildlife, including ducks, geese, and many kinds of fish. This fact alone makes them important to people. But wetlands also fill many direct human needs--serving as natural flood and erosion control devices, filters for water quality control, and groundwater recharge areas," Beattie said. "This year's awards recognize the crucial role individuals and the private sector play in protecting these valuable areas."

The Maine Coast Heritage Trust provides land conservation services to landowners, local land trusts, and government agencies throughout the state to protect Maine's distinctive shorelands and islands. Since 1970, the Trust has conserved more than 71,000 acres of land, including 177 entire islands.

"As a pioneer in Maine's wetlands protection efforts, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust has provided statewide leadership in establishing innovative land protection strategies," Beattie noted. "Working through non-regulatory partnership approaches, the Trust has secured conservation easements, mutual covenants, deed restrictions, leases, management agreements, and critical area registrations and reduced taxation strategies for protected lands. The Trust uses these realistic habitat protection options to safeguard a diversity of different wetlands."

In 1995 alone, the Trust completed 25 land protection projects covering more than 5,460 acres of land, including nearly 22 miles of shoreline. Working with community volunteers, state agencies, and major corporations, the Trust purchased land along Grand Lake Stream, one of the area's premier fishing streams and important bird breeding habitat. It also negotiated a "forever wild"

Office of Public Affairs
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
Room 3447

(202) 208-5634
FAX (202) 219-2428

easeement on Crowley Island, Addison, a state-designated Class A wildlife concentration area.

Other Trust efforts during the past year, including the Fletcher Wood Salt Marsh, Hog Island, Long Island, and Maine Coastal Nesting Islands projects, were completed in cooperation with Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge and Acadia National Park.

Dean and Murry Moore of Moore Brothers Farms were honored for their cooperative efforts to recreate 880 acres of bottomland hardwood forest on their property in west Tennessee. With assistance from several groups, the Moores restored soybean fields to their original forested conditions.

The Moores' efforts resulted in significant increases in the numbers and variety of migratory birds visiting the area. Former agricultural lands are now lush with native vegetation and teeming with migratory waterfowl and wading birds. Great blue herons recently established a rookery on the site.

"The Moore brothers showed us just how much a partnership approach can accomplish in restoring wetland habitat," Beattie said. "What began as an effort to qualify for the Conservation Reserve Program quickly grew into a partnership project with major benefits for wildlife. Through their effective coordination efforts with eight Federal, state, and private conservation organizations, the Moores showed us how to blend several programs and effectively restore wetland wildlife habitats."

This project has also become a showcase for monitoring and evaluating "direct seeding" acorns as a way of restoring bottomland hardwood forests. Since their efforts began, the Moore brothers have led more than 100 professional forestry and biology groups from the Southeast on tours of their restoration project. Moore Brothers Farms has also been featured in both local media and national agriculture publications.

The National Wetlands Conservation Award was established in 1990. Recipients are traditionally presented with an award plaque and a framed Federal Duck Stamp print at annual ceremonies celebrating the launching of each year's new Federal Duck Stamp, which raises funds for wetlands acquisition. The Coastal Heritage Trust will receive its award as part of the First-Day ceremonies for the new Federal Duck Stamp in Washington, DC, on June 27, 1996. Moore Brothers Farms will receive its award at a separate function in the Service's Southeast region.

The Service is involved in many wetlands conservation efforts as part of its responsibilities to protect migratory birds, inland fisheries, and endangered species--all of which depend on wetlands habitat for their survival.